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SMALL HOLDINGS, ALLOTMENTS, AND COMMON PASTURES:

And How to Get Them by the Act of 1907.

WHAT is the use of an allotment to a working man? It has many uses. In the first place, if he puts good labor into it, and if he keeps a pig to eat some of the produce and to supply manure, an acre allotment is worth three or four shillings a week to him, and often more.

Secondly, he is always sure of having a good supply of vegetables and potatoes for his family.

When he is out of work, too, he can spend some of the time that would otherwise be wasted, in improving his own piece of land.

Allotments make the laborers more independent when they have to deal with the farmers and landlords. Undoubtedly one of the chief things needed at the present time is an independent and sturdy spirit amongst the farm laborers. In our midland and southern villages they suffer constantly from low wages and harsh treatment, but the majority of them dare not say a single outspoken word to help to make things better. They take whatever wages are offered them and they put up with every tyranny without protest. Why is this? Chiefly because they depend on others for work and food, and seldom have any Trade Union to look after their interests. But if a laborer has a sack or two of flour in his cottage, and a couple of good sides of bacon, and a stock of potatoes to tide him over the winter, he does not feel nearly so helpless and humble. And an allotment can provide him with these things.

How to make an Allotment Profitable.

But allotments are not found to succeed everywhere and always. Certain things are necessary before they are likely to be of real use. The allotment must be

NEAR THE LABORER'S OWN HOME.

It is absurd to expect a man to walk out a mile or so and walk back again, after he has done a heavy day's work, in order to spend an hour on his allotment. And as an allotment always requires constant care and attention if it is to give the best results, it is absolutely necessary that it should be near the worker's home.

A FAIR RENT.

Often the laborers grow such good crops on their allotments and make them pay so well that the landlord takes the opportunity to charge them a much higher rent than he asks the farmer for the neighboring land of the same quality. Why should working men

pay a penalty for cultivating their land well? And why should they work hard and constantly in order that the landlord may get an extra rent? The rent must certainly be a fair one.

Small Holdings.

It is not only the laborer who finds it profitable to work a plot of land if he can get it at a fair rent and on reasonable conditions. Working as he does chiefly in his spare time, the allotment is large enough for his needs. But there is an increasing demand for land for another class of agriculturists, the men who wish to devote their whole time to a farm, the men who want a small holding up to fifty acres. Here, again, it is not always possible to bargain with the landlords for suitable farms at a fair price or on fair terms that will protect the tenant against loss of his improvements at the end of the tenancy.

Common Pasture.

There is another kind of land which is urgently needed by both laborers and small holders. In the olden days, before Englishmen allowed their land to be seized by a few landlords under the Enclosure Acts, there were many large commons, whereon the villagers had the right to feed their cattle and pigs. Many a cottager or small farmer would more easily be able to keep his cows, or his horse, or pigs, if he had a right to use ample common pasture. It is the loss of the old rights of grazing animals and gathering fuel on the common lands of the village which has done so much to put the people at the mercy of the landlords.

How to Get Allotments, Small Holdings, and Common Pasture.

Now the law of England says that it is the duty of local government councils to provide all these things—allotments, small holdings, and common pastures—if the people desire them, and cannot otherwise obtain them from the landlords on reasonable terms.

ALLOTMENTS.

In the case of allotments it is the business of the Borough Council, the Urban District Council, or the Parish Council (or the Parish Meeting in parishes where there is no Parish Council) to find the land for those who wish to work it. These Councils may purchase or hire land either by a voluntary agreement with the landlord or, if he refuses to come to reasonable terms, the Council can ask the Board of Agriculture to make an order compelling the landlord to accept the terms, which are to be settled by an arbitrator appointed by the Board; and this arbitrator must not add to the price because of the compulsion. However, if the land is only to be leased, then the lease must be for not less than fourteen or for more than thirty-five years; but this term can be renewed at the will of the Council. In the case of a Parish, the Council or Meeting, instead of proceeding itself, must ask the County Council to apply for the compulsory order; it hands over the land, when acquired, to the Parish, which must pay all expenses. If the County Council will not move, the Parish can appeal to the Board direct.

Having acquired the land, the Council can adapt it for use (by draining, fencing, road making, erecting buildings, including a dwelling house if accompanied by one acre), and let it out in allotments not exceeding five acres to any one of the laboring population, or to a group of persons working as a co-operative colony, or to an association for the promotion of allotments. The rent must be sufficient to repay all the money that the Council has spent on the land, so that no charge shall ultimately fall on the rates; but a Council may levy a rate or raise a loan to meet the expenses in the first instance. So long as it repays the expenses, the Council can let as cheaply and on as favorable terms as it pleases. And the tenant in every case can remove any fruit trees or bushes to which he has no claim for compensation on giving up the tenancy.

If a Council neglect to consider these matters, any six registered parliamentary electors or resident ratepayers can request (in writing) the Council to discuss the need of the neighborhood. Although these petitioners cannot force the Council to return a favorable answer to a request for land, this petition is a useful step to take, as it forces the Council to state its intentions.

If the Councils mentioned above refuse to take action in providing allotments, then it becomes the duty of the County Council to consider the situation (except in the case of a borough), and if it resolves that there is really need for allotments, then it (the County Council) at once takes over all the allotment powers of the Council which has neglected to take action. The County Council can acquire the allotments, and charge all the expenses on the defaulting Council.

If the County Council also neglects its duty, the Board of Agriculture can transfer all the above powers of a County Council to the Small Holdings Commissioners, who can then take all the steps which the County Council might have taken.

SMALL HOLDINGS.

It is the business of the County Council to find out whether there is a demand for small holdings; and it can acquire land for this purpose in practically the same manner as land can be acquired for allotments as stated above. That is, it can acquire it by purchase or by hiring, by compulsion if necessary, and can adapt the land for use as small holdings. The chief difference is that it can let or sell the land in plots of any size between one and fifty acres, or more than fifty acres if the annual value is not more than £50 as assessed for income tax. Further, the Council must not charge the county rates in any year with more than one penny in the pound on account of any expenses incurred for small holdings, including the annual repayments of any loans raised for such a purpose. If the holder desires to purchase his holding he can do so by half-yearly instalments over a period, agreed on by the Council, not exceeding fifty years.

And if the County Council will not proceed to supply small holdings then the Board of Agriculture (as in the case of allotments) can instruct the Small Holdings Commissioners to acquire the land and charge all expenses on the County Council.

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COMMON PASTURE.

This can be acquired by any Council which is empowered to acquire allotments and small holdings, and can be rented out to tenants or any laborers in the form of grazing rights. But it is necessary to get the sanction of the County Council before any other Council can take action in this way.

Co-operation.

But the County Council can do much more than provide the land necessary for allotments and small holdings and common pasture. The experience of successful farming shows most clearly that one of the great secrets of success is the co-operation of farmers for the purposes of buying their implements and manure, etc., of turning their milk into butter, and of sending their produce to market in the cheapest way. English farmers are very far behind the rest of the world in this respect; nevertheless they have begun to move slowly, and co-operative societies are growing in number. A County Council or the Board of Agriculture can make grants or loans of money for the promotion of co-operation between small holders or allotment workers.

What all these Powers Mean.

Simply this: that if the people elect the right men to the local Councils they can get allotments and small holdings on the best terms and ready for immediate use. The Councils can, further, by forming co-operative societies, help the tenants to buy and sell to much greater advantage than if each worker of land had to buy what he wants and to sell his produce on his own account. If the people of England want allotments and small holdings they can have them at once if they use their voting power on polling days.

And remember, if the local Councils refuse to find the land that is wanted, then the Government can force the Councils to act, or can buy the land itself. The Government has already appointed two Commissioners to inquire into the demand for land throughout England and Wales. The truth is the people can force the Government to do whatever they wish if they send the right men to Parliament, and the easiest way to get the Government to attend is to write to your Member of Parliament. But if the voters put men on the Parish, Urban and County Councils, or in Parliament, simply because of their wealth and position and without their having shown genuine good-will towards the people, they are certain not to get what they want. The working men can elect anyone they choose, for they are in the majority. Let them, therefore, make up their minds firmly beforehand whom they wish to have as Councillors, and, when the election comes, let them support their candidates loyally through thick and thin.

Price, 6 for 1d.: 1s. per 100: 8s. 6d. per 1,000.

Fabian Tract No. 62, "Parish and District Councils: what they are and what they can do," 1d.; Leaflet No. 63, "Parish Council Cottages," 6 for 1d.

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